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ABSTRACT

In spring 1995, Illinois' Moraine Valley Community College (MVCC) conducted a two-part survey of a random sample of 800 new students to determine their activities, satisfaction with college services, problems at the college, and sources of help. In addition, variables associated with the student retention and attrition through 1995-96 were identified. Study findings, based on usable responses from 288 students, included the following: (1) respondents were 62% female and 89% White, while 78% indicated that they planned to transfer; (2) the most frequent activities at MVCC cited by students were participating in class discussions, socializing with other students, and writing term or research papers; (3) the most commonly cited difficulties at the college were finding self-discipline to study, problems with mathematics, and financial difficulties; (4) 73% of the respondents preferred to work out their problems by themselves, with only 22% indicating that they had talked to a counselor or instructor; (5) the spring-to-fall retention rate for survey respondents was 76%, compared to 63% for non-respondents; and (6) variables found to be significantly related to retention included plans to re-enroll at MVCC, hours employed, credit hours attempted, the use of the library, student age, and difficulties in attending class. A list of characteristics not significantly related to retention is appended. (AJL)

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ED 401 965

Retention/New Student Survey--Spring 1995 Parts 1and 2

By

Moraine Valley Community College

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Date: April 1996

RE: Retention/New Student Survey - Spring 1995, Part I

Introduction

A retention/new student survey was developed by the Research Office and a subgroup of the Enrollment Management committee. One major purpose of the survey was to gather information on new students' Moraine Valley activities, satisfaction with Moraine Valley services, problems experienced at Moraine Valley, and sources of help in solving them. A second major purpose of the survey was to identify variables which predict retention or attrition. This report summarizes survey responses. A follow-up report will analyze retention, comparing characteristics of the students who returned in 1995-96 to those who did not.

Retention literature and existing surveys were reviewed during survey construction. Common themes in the retention literature and the Moraine Valley Retention Plan model were used to determine themes and questions for the survey. Major themes include *organizational items* (admissions and registration, orientation, financial aid, scheduling of courses, campus appearance and facilities), *academic integration* (study habits, faculty contacts, certainty about the major, class attendance, academic advising, counseling, and the library and other support services), and *social integration* (friends on campus, informal contact with faculty, college activities and clubs). A few questions were included on *environmental factors* over which the college has no control (financial difficulties, work or family responsibilities and parents' level of education).

The survey instrument was piloted in all Critical Reading (RDG-091) classes in fall 1994. These students were asked to complete the survey and then to comment on the instrument itself, the layout and readability. They were also asked to make suggestions for changes and to indicate any questions they found confusing. A few student comments were incorporated in the final version of the survey.

Methodology

Surveys were mailed to new students about three-fourths of the way through their first year at Moraine Valley. This survey distribution date was chosen to allow students sufficient time to use Moraine Valley services before evaluating them. Note however, that this excludes first-time students who attended the fall semester only.

A random sample of students who were first-time transfer or career students in fall 1994, and who were still enrolled at Moraine Valley in spring 1995, were selected to receive the survey. Transfer and career students include students who identified themselves as course enrollees (students taking transfer or occupational courses who are not "in" the program). Students enrolled primarily in remedial, vocational skills, adult basic education, adult secondary education, English

as a second language, or non-credit courses were excluded.

There were 3,294 new transfer or career students registered in fall 1994 and 2,104 (64 percent) were still enrolled in spring 1995. A random sample of 800 of these students was selected to receive a survey mailed in March 1995. A postcard reminder was mailed in April 1995, followed by a second cover letter and survey to non-respondents in May 1995. A total of 300 surveys was returned (13 were undeliverable) yielding a response rate of 38 percent. The survey was somewhat longer (3 pages) than the typical Moraine Valley mailed surveys (2 pages) and the return rate was slightly below average.

In addition to data obtained from the survey, the following report summarizes data obtained from Moraine Valley student records. Unless otherwise noted, percentages in the tables and charts are based on the number responding to the question. Some percentages may not add up to 100 percent because of rounding; some gap scores appear to not add up because of rounding.

Respondent Demographics

Table 1 shows respondent demographics; these were obtained from Moraine Valley student record files. These characteristics are based on 288 of the 300 respondents because 12 students removed their survey label and thus could not be identified.

More than 6 out of 10 respondents were female (62 percent) and 38 percent were male. More than three-fourths were age 24 or under (78 percent) and 22 percent were 25 or older. Almost 9 out of 10 respondents were white (89 percent); 11 percent were minorities.

Slightly more than half (51 percent) were recent high school graduates (had graduated from high school in January or June 1994) and slightly less were not (or their status was unknown.) Slightly more than two-thirds of respondents (68 percent) were enrolled in a transfer program or transfer courses in fall 1994 and almost one-third (32 percent) were enrolled in career programs or courses. Slightly less than two-thirds were enrolled full-time in fall 1994 (63 percent), while 37 percent were enrolled part-time.

Almost 8 out of 10 indicated that they planned to transfer (78 percent) and 22 percent had no transfer plans. In fall 1994, one-third of the respondents were enrolled in one or more remedial courses, while two-thirds were enrolled in college-level courses only.

A comparison of selected demographic characteristics was made between survey respondents and the selected population (all new transfer or occupational, fall 1994-spring 1995 students, N=2,104). The respondents' majors, transfer plans, ethnic status and part-time or full-time status were representative of the selected population. However, survey respondents were somewhat older and more likely to be female than the selected population. This response rate pattern (higher percentages of female and older students) often occurs in Moraine Valley mailed surveys. Classroom surveys on the other hand, tend to have an over-representation of full-time, younger students.

Table 1
Student Characteristics*
N = 288

	Number	Percent
Gender		
Female	179	62%
Male	109	38%
	288	100%
Age		
Under 25	223	78%
25 and older	63	22%
	286	100%
Ethnic		
Afr. American/Black	7	2%
American Indian	3	1%
Asian	7	2%
Foreign Student	5	2%
Hispanic	9	3%
White	251	89%
	282	100%
Recent high school graduate		
Yes	148	51%
No/unknown	140	49%
	288	100%
Major		
Transfer program/courses	196	68%
Career program/courses	92	32%
	288	100%
Enrollment Status		
Full-time	182	63%
Part-time	106	37%
	288	100%
Transfer Plan		
Yes	191	78%
No	53	22%
	244	100%
Enrolled in remedial course(s)?		
Yes	96	33%
No	192	67%
	288	100%

* Students' first term - fall 1994.

Background Information and Educational Goals

Charts 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 show additional background information and educational goals. This information was obtained from survey responses.

Chart 1 shows the highest level of formal education completed by either parent. About 4 out of 10 respondents were first-generation college students: their parents had less than a high school diploma (7 percent) or had completed high school but not attended any college (34 percent). A total of 33 percent: had "some college or technical school" (28 percent) or were two-year college graduates (5 percent). A total of 25 percent were four-year college graduates (15 percent) or had postgraduate study or a degree (10 percent). Two percent of respondents did not know the highest level of education completed by either parent.

Chart 1
Highest Level of Education Completed by Either Parent

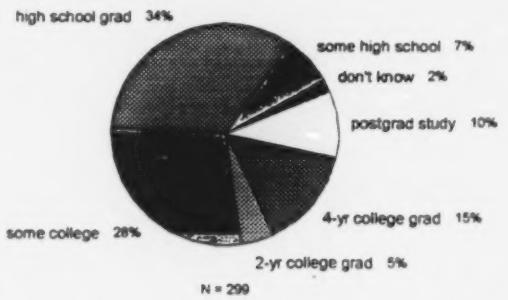
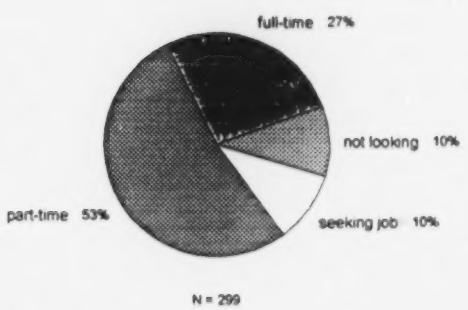
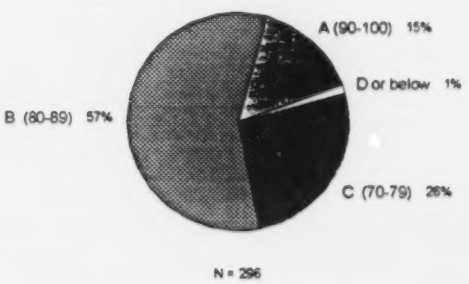


Chart 2
Employment Status



Respondents' employment status in spring 1995 is shown in Chart 2. Eighty percent of respondents were employed, with 27 percent working full-time and 53 percent working part-time. Equal percentages were not employed and not seeking a job, and not employed and actively seeking work (10 percent).

Chart 3
High School Grades



Respondents' average grades in high school are shown in Chart 3. The majority of students (57 percent) had a B average in high school (80-89) and 15 percent had an A average (90-100). Slightly more than one-fourth (26 percent) had a C average (70-79). Only one percent admitted to an average of D or below.

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Chart 4 shows respondents' primary initial purpose for attending Moraine Valley. By far the largest percent said they came to Moraine Valley to take course work for transfer to another college (64 percent). The next largest number came to obtain a two-year degree or certificate for job entry (25 percent). Much smaller numbers came to Moraine Valley to: take job-related or job-required courses (4 percent), explore courses to decide on a career (3 percent), pursue recreational or personal interests (2 percent), or "other" (2 percent).

Chart 4
Primary Purpose for Attending Moraine Valley

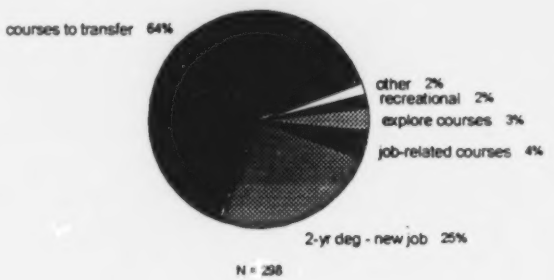
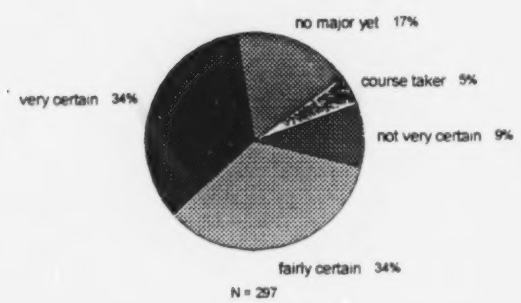


Chart 5 shows how certain respondents are that their current major is the one they will pursue until graduation. Slightly more than one-third are "very certain" about their current major (34 percent), the same percent are "fairly certain." A total of 26 percent either were "not very certain" about their current major (9 percent) or had not yet selected a major (17 percent). Only five percent said they were just taking courses and didn't plan to graduate.

Chart 5
Certainty About Current Major



Moraine Valley Activities

Respondents were asked how often they had done selected academic/college activities during the school year. Twelve activities are shown in table 2, listed in order of most frequent activity to least.

The three most frequent activities are: participated in class discussions, socialized with other students on campus, and wrote term or research paper. Almost all students (98 percent) participated in class discussions. More than 80 percent socialized with other students and/or wrote a research paper.

The three least popular activities were: not completing homework; talking with an advisor/counselor about courses to take, requirements or education plans; and attending an art exhibit, concert or play on campus. Twenty percent of respondents did not complete their homework three or more times, while 80 percent usually completed it. More than one-third of the students had *not* talked with an academic advisor. One-third of students had attended at least

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one art exhibit, concert or play on campus.

Table 2
Moraine Valley Activities
In Order by Frequency

Activity	Never	Once or twice	3-5 times	6 or more times
Participated in class discussions	2%	16%	24%	58%
Socialized with other students on campus	13%	12%	17%	58%
Wrote term or research paper	19%	27%	25%	28%
Used the library as a quiet place to read or study	26%	27%	17%	31%
Talked with a teacher in his/her office or outside of class	17%	40%	31%	12%
Used the computer in the LRC to find books	35%	19%	25%	21%
Studied with other students	33%	27%	19%	20%
Skipped class	29%	34%	20%	17%
Used computer lab/Writing Center	42%	22%	14%	22%
Did not complete homework	44%	36%	10%	10%
Talked with an advisor/counselor about courses to take, requirements or education plans	36%	48%	13%	3%
Attended an art exhibit, concert or play on campus	67%	25%	5%	3%

Difficulties Experienced at Moraine Valley

Students were given a list of 17 academic or personal difficulties and asked to indicate how often in this school year they had experienced each difficulty. The percent who "sometimes" or "frequently" experienced each problem is shown in Chart 6. The top three difficulties were: finding the self-discipline to study (45 percent), math difficulties (44 percent), and financial problems (41 percent). Difficulties experienced by 30-38 percent were: work responsibilities interfere with school work, difficulty making a decision about my major, dissatisfied with an instructor, test-taking problems, personal responsibilities interfere with school work, and trouble paying attention to the teacher. Problems experienced by the fewest respondents were: reading difficulties (12 percent), can't find a place to study (8 percent), and transportation difficulties (can't get to class, 4 percent).

At least one difficulty was reported by 93 percent of respondents. The fewest reported was zero, the most was 13, and the average number of difficulties reported was 4.9.

Chart 6
Difficulties Experienced at MVCC

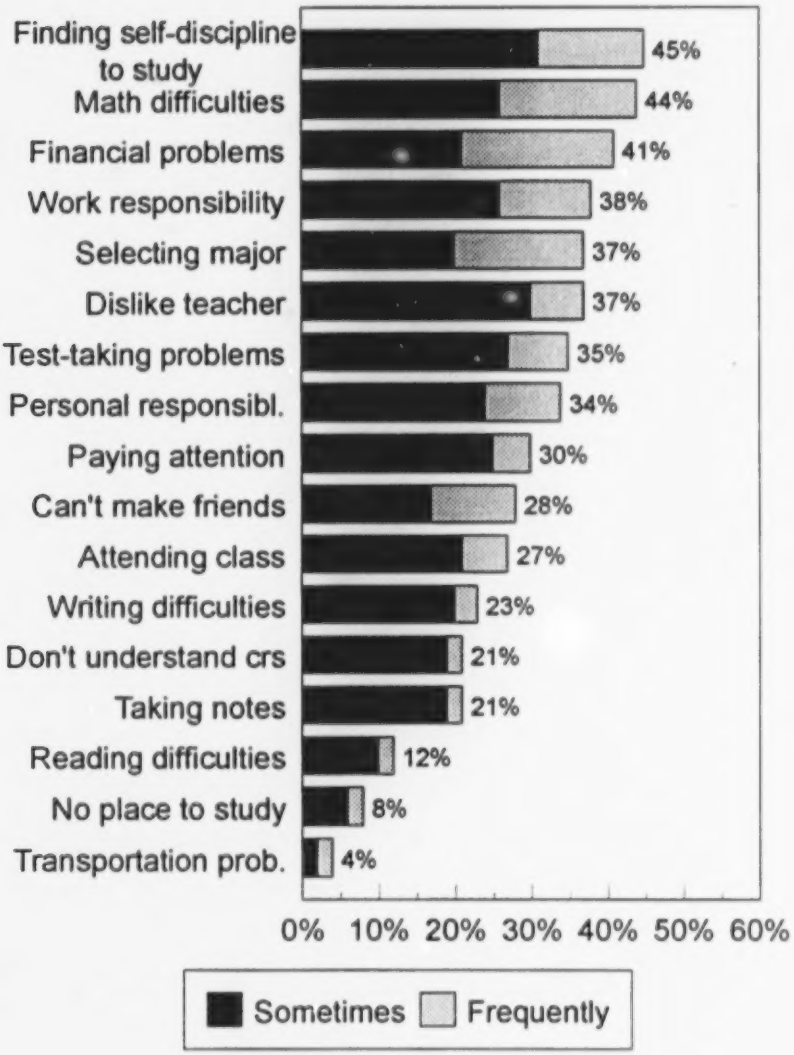
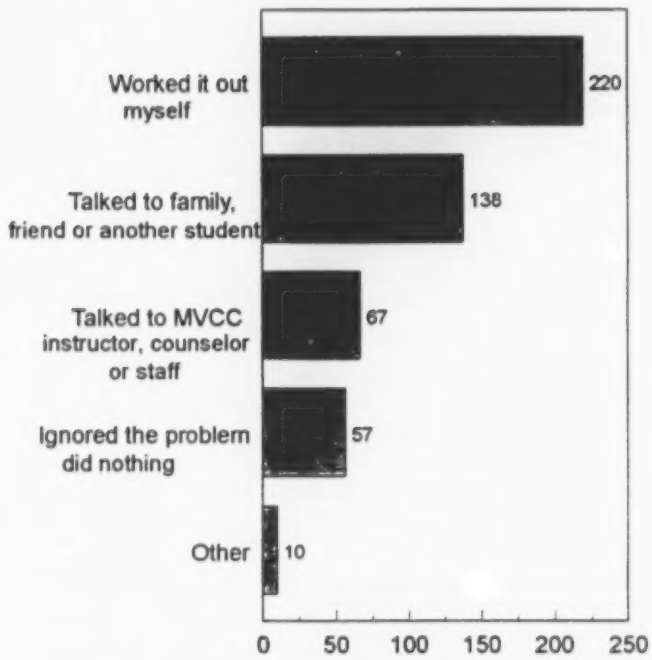


Chart 7 shows what students did to get help when faced with difficulties. The most frequent solution was to "work it out myself," chosen by 220 (73 percent of all respondents.) Students were more than twice as likely to get help by talking to family, friend, or another student (N=138, 46 percent), than they were by talking to a Moraine Valley instructor, counselor, or staff member (N=67, 22 percent). The number who "ignored the problem, did nothing" (N=57, 19 percent) was only 10 less than the number who talked to Moraine Valley staff.

Chart 7
What Did You Do to Get Help?
(Number Choosing Response)



note: students could give more than one response

Items Most Important to Students

For each of 26 Moraine Valley characteristics or services, students were asked to rate how important the item was on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 = very important, 1 = not at all important). Mean scores were computed for all items and ranged from a low of 2.55 to a high of 4.69. The average importance score for all items was 3.87. See Table 3 and Appendix A.

The five most important items had an importance score ranging between 4.53 and 4.69, at least 0.66 above average. Four of the top five were course or scheduling related (classes scheduled at convenient times, availability of needed classes, variety of courses offered, and convenient registration process) and one was academic (quality of faculty).

Other items with an importance score of 4.0 or above were: overall quality of academic facilities, (library, laboratories, computers, etc.), library facilities and services, challenging/stimulating courses, academic advising/course planning help, advisor availability, and availability of computer labs.

The five least important items had importance scores ranging from 2.55 to 3.32, at least 0.55

Table 3

Moraine Valley Services and Characteristics
In Order by Importance to Students

Item	Importance Score
Classes scheduled at convenient times	4.69
Availability of needed classes	4.67
Variety of courses offered	4.62
Convenient registration process	4.61
Quality of faculty	4.53
Overall quality of academic facilities (library, laboratories, computers, etc.)	4.44
Library facilities and services	4.30
Challenging/stimulating courses	4.19
Academic advising/course planning help	4.19
Advisor availability	4.11
Availability of computer labs	4.00
Faculty availability outside of class	3.97
Academic reputation of the college	3.95
Career counseling services	3.86
Opportunities to make friends/meet new people	3.81
Financial aid assistance	3.72
Counselor availability	3.67
Tutoring	3.62
Availability of channels for expressing student complaint	3.58
Attractiveness of campus/buildings	3.55
Informal contact with faculty	3.40
Recreational facilities	3.32
New student orientation	3.27
Personal counseling services (for personal problems)	3.07
Availability of student clubs and organizations	2.86
Minority student services	2.55
Mean score overall	3.87

below average. Four of the least important items were student services: new student orientation, personal counseling services (for personal problems), availability of student clubs and organizations, and minority student services. The remaining item was facilities-related (recreational facilities).

Student Satisfaction

A second score obtained from the selected Moraine Valley characteristics or services was the *satisfaction* score. Students were asked to rate how satisfied they were with each item on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 = very satisfied, 1 = not at all satisfied). Mean scores were computed for all items and ranged from a low of 3.14 to a high of 4.14. See Table 4. The average satisfaction score for all items was 3.72, slightly less (0.14) than the average importance score.

The top five satisfaction scores ranged between 4.0 and 4.14, at least 0.28 above average. (The

Table 4

Moraine Valley Services and Characteristics
In Order by Satisfaction with Moraine Valley

Item	Satisfaction
Overall quality of academic facilities (library, laboratories, computers, etc.)	4.14
Availability of computer labs	4.07
Library facilities and services	4.05
Variety of courses offered	4.05
Attractiveness of campus/buildings	4.00
Quality of faculty	4.00
Challenging/stimulating courses	3.95
Academic reputation of the college	3.95
Classes scheduled at convenient times	3.87
Faculty availability outside of class	3.83
Convenient registration process	3.81
Tutoring	3.77
Opportunities to make friends/meet new people	3.70
New student orientation	3.70
Personal counseling services (for personal problems)	3.67
Recreational facilities	3.62
Counselor availability	3.61
Availability of needed classes	3.58
Informal contact with faculty	3.57
Advisor availability	3.54
Academic advising/course planning help	3.53
Career counseling services	3.47
Availability of student clubs and organizations	3.45
Minority student services	3.41
Financial aid assistance	3.34
Availability of channels for expressing student complaints	3.14
Mean score overall	3.72

top five satisfaction scores yielded 6 items.) Four of the top items were facilities-related: overall quality of academic facilities (library, laboratories, computers, etc.), availability of computer labs, library facilities and services, and attractiveness of campus/buildings. One item was course-related (variety of courses offered) and one was academic (quality of faculty).

The five items with the lowest satisfaction score were: career counseling services, availability of student clubs and organizations, minority student services, financial aid assistance, and availability of channels for expressing student complaints. These items had a satisfaction score between 3.14 and 3.47, at least 0.25 below average.

Not surprisingly, minority services were significantly more important to minority students. While most students rated the importance of minority services, far fewer rated their satisfaction with this

service. Most minority students rated their satisfaction with minority services, while three-fourths of white students did *not* rate their satisfaction with minority services. Overall, the college's minority student services were rated higher by minority students (3.67) than white students (3.31), however the difference was not statistically significant.

Performance Gap

A third score obtained from the 26 Moraine Valley characteristics or services was the *gap* score. This was obtained by subtracting the satisfaction score from the importance score. A large positive performance gap score indicates that the institution is *not* meeting students' expectations, a small or zero gap score indicates that an institution *is* meeting students' expectations, and a negative gap score indicates that an institution is *exceeding* students' expectations. See Appendix A for a complete list of all items and their gap scores.

Items with a large negative gap score (item exceeded expectations) are: minority student services (-0.86), personal counseling services for personal problems (-0.60), availability of student clubs and organizations (-0.59), attractiveness of campus/buildings (-0.45), new student orientation (-0.43), and recreational facilities (-0.30). However, except for attractiveness of campus/buildings, these items had a large negative gap score because the importance score was low, rather than because students were highly satisfied.

Items with a small or zero gap score (item has met expectations) were: informal contact with faculty (-0.17), tutoring (-0.15), availability of computer labs (-0.08), academic reputation of the college (0.00), counselor availability (0.06), opportunities to make friends/meet new people (0.10), and faculty availability outside of class (0.14).

Items with the largest positive gap score (item has not met expectations) were: academic advising/course planning help, convenient registration process, classes scheduled at convenient times, and availability of needed classes.

Combinations of gap scores are another way to look at this data. Two combinations of scores are shown in Tables 5 and 6: high importance/high satisfaction and high importance/low satisfaction. Areas of high importance/high satisfaction can be considered strength areas while areas with high importance/low satisfaction can be considered areas of weakness.

Table 5 shows areas of high importance and high satisfaction. For these items, the importance scores were at least 0.1 above average and the satisfaction scores were at least 0.1 above average. Eight items met these criteria. The items in Table 5 are ordered by gap score, ranging from a low of -0.08 to a high of 0.82.

The top three "strength" areas are: availability of computer labs, faculty availability outside of class, and challenging/stimulating courses. Other strength areas are: library facilities and services, overall quality of academic facilities (library, laboratories, computers, etc.), quality of faculty, variety of courses offered, and classes scheduled at convenient times. Note, however, that six of the eight strength areas had above average gap scores.

Table 5

Areas of High Importance and High Satisfaction

Item	Importance	Satisfaction	Gap Score
Availability of computer labs	4.00	4.07	-0.08
Faculty availability outside of class	3.97	3.83	0.14
Challenging/stimulating courses	4.19	3.95	0.23
Library facilities and services	4.30	4.05	0.25
Overall quality of academic facilities (library, laboratories, computers, etc.)	4.44	4.14	0.31
Quality of faculty	4.53	4.00	0.54
Variety of courses offered	4.62	4.05	0.57
Classes scheduled at convenient times	4.69	3.87	0.82

Average importance score = 3.87; average satisfaction score = 3.72; average gap score = 0.14

Table 6 shows areas of high importance and low satisfaction. For these items, importance scores were at least 0.1 above average and satisfaction scores were at least 0.1 *below* average. Only three items met these criteria: availability of needed classes, academic advising/course planning help, and advisor availability. All three items had gap scores well above average, ranging from 0.57 to 1.09.

Table 6

Areas of High Importance and Low Satisfaction

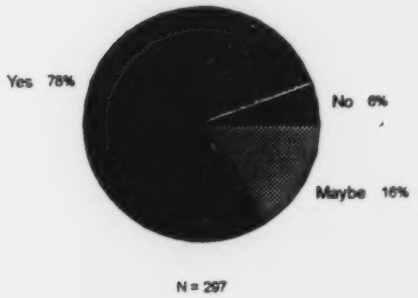
Item	Importance	Satisfaction	Gap Score
Availability of needed classes	4.67	3.58	1.09
Academic advising/course planning help	4.19	3.53	0.66
Advisor availability	4.11	3.54	0.57

Average importance score = 3.87; average satisfaction score = 3.72; average gap score = 0.14

Evaluation of Moraine Valley and Future Plans

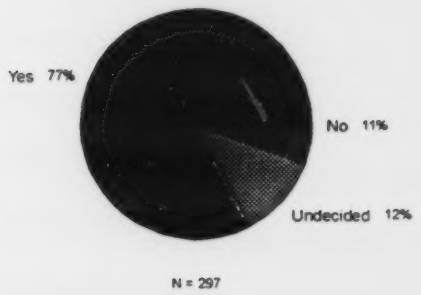
As shown in Chart 8, almost 8 out of 10 respondents (78 percent) said that if they could start over again, they would still attend Moraine Valley. Sixteen percent said "maybe" and only 6 percent said no.

Chart 8
If you could start over again, would you still attend Moraine Valley?



Slightly more than three-fourths of the respondents (77 percent) planned to enroll at Moraine Valley the next year. Twelve percent were undecided and a fairly low 11 percent did not plan to return the next year. See Chart 9.

Chart 9
Do you plan to re-enroll at Moraine Valley next year?



Summary

A retention/new student survey was developed by the Research Office and a subgroup of the Enrollment Management committee to evaluate Moraine Valley services and to identify retention variables. A random sample of 800 new first-time transfer or career students received the survey in spring 1995, and 38 percent responded. This report summarizes survey responses. A follow-up report will analyze retention variables.

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- The respondents' major, transfer plans, ethnic status and part-time or full-time status were representative of all new transfer and occupational students. However, survey respondents were somewhat older and more likely to be female.
- About 4 out of 10 respondents were first-generation college students.
- The majority of students were "B" students in high school.
- More than 6 out of 10 came to Moraine Valley to take transfer courses.
- Slightly more than two-thirds are "very certain" or "fairly certain" about their current major.
- The three most frequent campus activities were: participating in class discussions, socializing with other students, and writing a term paper.
- The three least popular campus activities were: not completing homework; talking with an advisor/counselor about education plans, and attending an art exhibit, concert or play on campus.
- The top three difficulties experienced were: finding the self-discipline to study, math difficulties and financial difficulties.
- Problems experienced by the fewest were: reading difficulties, finding a place to study, and transportation problems.
- When faced with difficulties, the most frequent solution was to "work it out myself."
- The five services or characteristics most important to students were: classes scheduled at convenient times, availability of needed classes, variety of courses offered, convenient registration process, and quality of faculty.
- The five least important services were: recreational facilities, new student orientation, personal counseling services, availability of student clubs, and minority student services.
- Services students were most satisfied with were: quality of academic facilities, availability of computer labs, library facilities and services, attractiveness of campus/buildings, variety of courses, and quality of faculty.
- The five lowest satisfaction items were: career counseling services, availability of student clubs and organizations, minority student services, financial aid assistance, and availability of channels for expressing student complaints.
- While the satisfaction score for minority services was low, the gap score was negative, indicating that this item exceeded students' expectations.
- Minority students rated their satisfaction with minority services higher than white students did.
- Other services that exceeded expectations were: personal counseling services for personal problems, availability of student clubs and organizations, attractiveness of campus/buildings, new student orientation, and recreational facilities.
- The top three "strength" areas (high importance/high satisfaction) were: availability of computer labs, faculty availability outside of class, and challenging/stimulating courses.
- The "weakness" areas (high importance/low satisfaction) were: availability of needed classes,

academic advising/course planning help, and advisor availability.

- Slightly more than three-fourths of respondents planned to enroll at Moraine Valley the next year.
- Almost 8 out of 10 respondents said that if they could start over again, they would still attend Moraine Valley.

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Appendix A
Moraine Valley Services and Characteristics
In Order by Satisfaction with Moraine Valley

Item	Importance Score	Satisfaction Score	Performance Gap*
Overall quality of academic facilities (library, laboratories, computers, etc.)	4.44	4.14	0.31
Availability of computer labs	4.00	4.07	-0.08
Library facilities and services	4.30	4.05	0.25
Variety of courses offered	4.62	4.05	0.57
Attractiveness of campus/buildings	3.55	4.00	-0.45
Quality of faculty	4.53	4.00	0.54
Challenging/stimulating courses	4.19	3.95	0.23
Academic reputation of the college	3.95	3.95	0.00
Classes scheduled at convenient times	4.69	3.87	0.82
Faculty availability outside of class	3.97	3.83	0.14
Convenient registration process	4.61	3.81	0.80
Tutoring	3.62	3.77	-0.15
Opportunities to make friends/meet new people	3.81	3.70	0.10
New student orientation	3.27	3.70	-0.43
Personal counseling services (for personal problems)	3.07	3.67	-0.60
Recreational facilities	3.32	3.62	-0.30
Counselor availability	3.67	3.61	0.06
Availability of needed classes	4.67	3.58	1.09
Informal contact with faculty	3.40	3.57	-0.17
Advisor availability	4.11	3.54	0.57
Academic advising/course planning help	4.19	3.53	0.66
Career counseling services	3.86	3.47	0.39
Availability of student clubs and organizations	2.86	3.45	-0.59
Minority student services	2.55	3.41	-0.86
Financial aid assistance	3.72	3.34	0.38
Availability of channels for expressing student complaints	3.58	3.14	0.44
Mean score overall	3.87	3.72	0.14

* note: some performance gap scores appear to not add up because of rounding.

Date: June 1996

RE: Retention/New Student Survey - Spring 1995, Part 2

Introduction

A retention/new student survey was developed by the Research Office and a subgroup of the Enrollment Management committee. One major purpose of the survey was to identify variables which predict retention or attrition. A second major purpose of the survey was to gather information on new students' Moraine Valley activities, satisfaction with Moraine Valley services, problems experienced at Moraine Valley, and sources of help in solving them. This report summarizes student characteristics which predict retention and those which do not. Part 1 of this report (issued April 1996) summarized survey responses.

Retention literature and existing surveys were reviewed during survey construction. Common themes in the retention literature and the Moraine Valley Retention Plan model were used to determine themes and questions for the survey. Major themes include *organizational items* (admissions and registration, orientation, financial aid, scheduling of courses, campus appearance and facilities), *academic integration* (study habits, faculty contacts, certainty about the major, class attendance, academic advising, counseling, and the library and other support services), and *social integration* (friends on campus, informal contact with faculty, college activities and clubs). A few questions were included on *environmental factors* over which the college has no control (financial difficulties, work or family responsibilities and parents' level of education).

A random sample of 800 students who attended Moraine Valley in fall 1994 and spring 1995 received the survey in March 1995. This survey distribution date was chosen to allow students sufficient time (about 7 months) to use Moraine Valley services before evaluating them. The survey response rate was 38 percent; this was slightly below average.

A total of 3,294 new transfer or career students registered in fall 1994 and 2,104 (64 percent) were still enrolled in spring 1995. Of the 2,104 students enrolled both fall and spring, 67 percent returned in fall 1995. The spring to fall retention rate was 3 percent higher than the fall to spring rate, indicating a higher attrition rate for first-time students after the first semester than after the first year.

The spring to fall retention rate was very slightly higher for the 800 students who received the survey (68 percent). The retention rate was significantly higher for survey respondents (76 percent) than non-respondents (63 percent).

Results were analyzed using both bivariate correlation and multiple regression. Pearson correlations and their associated probabilities appear in Table 1. Also shown in the table are the values assigned to each variable. Retention, for example, was set equal to 2 if the student

returned the following fall and spring, 1 if they returned fall or spring and 0 if they did not return the following year.

Table 1
Correlation Coefficients for Characteristics Significantly Related to Retention

Correlation of retention [a] and:	Correlation Coefficient	p
Plan to re-enroll (yes=2, maybe=1, no=0)	.43	.0001**
Hours employed	-.32	.0001**
Credit hours attempted (first term)	.24	.0001 **
Used the library as a quiet place to read or study (6+times=6, 3-5 times=4, 1-2 times=2, never=0)	.22	.0002**
Age	-.16	.01**
Difficulty attending class every day (frequently=4, sometimes=2, seldom=1, never=0)	-.16	.01**
If you could start over, would you still attend MVCC? (yes=2, maybe=1, no=0)	.16	.01**
Used a computer in the LRC to find books (6+times=6, 3-5 times=4, 1-2 times=2, never=0)	.14	.02*
Socialized with other students on campus (6+times=6, 3-5 times=4, 1-2 times=2, never=0)	.13	.02*
Satisfaction with library facilities and services (1=not at all to 5 = very satisfied)	.13	.03*
Hard time meeting people or making new friends on campus (frequently=4, sometimes=2, seldom=1, never=0)	.12	.04*
Trouble taking notes in class (frequently=4, sometimes=2, seldom=1, never=0)	.12	.04*

Note: the number of observations was between 283 and 288 for each variable.
[a] (2=returned following fall ***and*** spring, 1= returned fall ***or*** spring, 0 = did not attend the following year)
*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.001$, all correlations are statistically significant.

The correlations revealed 12 predictor variables that were significantly related to retention: plan to re-enroll at Moraine Valley ($r = .43$), hours employed ($r = -.32$), credit hours attempted ($r = .24$), used the library as a quiet place to read or study ($r = .22$), age ($r = -.16$), difficulty attending class every day ($r = -.16$), "if you could start over, would you still attend MVCC?"

(r = .16), used a computer in the LRC to find books (r = .14), socialized with other students on campus (r = .13), satisfaction with library facilities and services (r = .13), hard time meeting people or making new friends on campus (r = .12), and trouble taking notes in class (r = .12). While some of the correlations were small, all were significant at the .01 or .05 level.

Correlation coefficients range from -1.0 to 1.0. A positive correlation indicates that as the value of the item increases, retention increases. For example, as the number of semester credit hours a student is enrolled increases the likelihood of retention increases. Three items had a negative correlation, indicating that as work hours, age, and the difficulty of attending class increase the likelihood of retention decreases.

Most correlations were in the predicted direction. Other studies, for example, have shown a higher retention rate for younger, full-time students and a lower retention rate for older, part-time students. Retention literature often shows that satisfaction with an institution and integration in campus life (socializing with others and higher usage of facilities) are correlated with higher retention rates.

Two correlations however, (trouble taking notes in class and hard time meeting people or making new friends on campus) were not in the expected direction. One might assume that students who had more trouble taking notes or making friends would return at a lower rate. However, the survey respondents who indicated problems in these areas returned at a slightly higher rate than those who did not.

Using multiple regression, retention was then regressed on the linear combination of these 12 variables. The equation containing these 12 variables accounted for 36% of the variance in retention (F (12,210) = 9.9, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 36$), and was statistically significant at the .01 level.

Table 2 shows the beta weights for each variable. The beta weights are the regression coefficients that would be obtained if all the variables were standardized, so that they had the same standard deviations. Beta weights are used to assess the relative importance of each variable in the prediction of retention. Table 2 also shows the t test for significance of the beta weights.

The table shows that only four variables (plans to re-enroll, credit hours attempted, hours employed and difficulty attending class every day) displayed significant beta weights. The beta weight for plans to re-enroll is .48, indicating that this is the most important predictor of retention. The second most important predictor is first term credit hours attempted (beta weight = .21). Hours employed and difficulty attending classes every day have a negative beta weight (-.15, -.13), indicating that as work hours and difficulty attending class increases, the likelihood of retention decreases.

Three of the factors which contribute significantly to retention (credit hours attempted, hours employed and difficulty attending class every day) are factors largely beyond the college's control. But a student's plan to re-enroll is affected by their overall satisfaction with the college and thus is (at least somewhat) under the college's control. Of course, some students do not plan to return because of external environmental factors (e.g., work schedule changes). And students may be

very satisfied with Moraine Valley and not choose to re-enroll because they completed their objective or achieved their goal for attending.

Table 2
Beta Weights Obtained in Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Retention
(N = 223)

Predictor variable	Beta Weights[a]	t[b]
Plan to re-enroll	.48	7.19**
Credit hours attempted (first term)	.21	2.66**
Hours employed	-.15	-2.29*
Difficulty attending class every day	-.13	-2.25*
Satisfaction with library facilities and services	.08	1.26
Age	-.08	-1.01
Trouble taking notes in class	.07	1.20
Hard time meeting people or making new friends on campus	.07	1.14
If you could start over, would you still attend MVCC?	.06	.95
Used the library as a quiet place to read or study	.04	.52
Socialized with other students on campus	.03	.47
Used a computer in the LRC to find books	.01	.13

$R^2 = 0.36$

[a]The beta weights shown in the table are standardized multiple regression coefficients obtained when retention was regressed on all 12 predictors.

[b]For t tests that tested the significance of the beta weights df = 12.

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.001

Eight items (satisfaction with library facilities and services, age, trouble taking notes, hard time making friends, "if you could start over, would you still attend MVCC?", used the library to read or study, socialized with other students, and used computer in the LRC) had a statistically significant correlation with retention but were not found to be significant in the regression model.

One explanation for this is a statistical phenomenon called "multicollinearity," which occurs when two or more predictor variables demonstrate a high degree of correlation with one another. Plans to re-enroll, for example, is highly (positively) correlated with "if you could start over, would you

still attend Moraine Valley" and satisfaction with LRC services; and is negatively correlated with difficulty in attending class every day. Credit hours attempted has a high positive correlation with socializing with other students, used a computer in the LRC, and use the LRC as a quiet place to study; and has a high negative correlation with hours worked. For the regression equation then, plans to re-enroll and "if you could start over, would you still attend MVCC," age and work hours, etc., essentially measure the same thing.

Multicollinearity can cause regression estimates to fail to demonstrate statistical significance and lower beta weights. If hours worked, for example, were dropped from the model in table 2 then age would be a statistically significant predictor of retention (and the beta weight would increase).

In addition to the regression analysis shown in Table 2, other ordinary least-squares (OLS) multiple regression equations were run to predict the probability of returning to Moraine Valley. (Analyses were also done using logistic regression, but the results were essentially the same. OLS was adopted as producing results that are easier to interpret and more familiar to most readers.) Several models were run with all or most of the 75 survey evaluation items, activity items and demographic variables loaded. While several of these models yielded a higher R^2 than that shown above, the number of cases for the regression analysis was greatly reduced because of non-response. No other variables were found to be significant in any other models.

In addition to the models using single variables, equations using different *combinations* of survey questions were analyzed (for example, total Moraine Valley activities, total problems experienced at Moraine Valley, average satisfaction score, advising/counseling score, academic integration score, student support climate, etc.) None of the combined variables were found to be significant predictors of retention. Appendix A shows all characteristics that were **not** found to be significantly related to retention. A copy of the survey is available from the Research Office.

Summary

In some respects, the findings in this study were consistent with the findings reported in the literature. Student satisfaction (as measured by plans to re-enroll and "if you could start over, would you still attend Moraine Valley") were moderate predictors of retention. Integration in campus life (as measured by the number of hours enrolled first term, use and satisfaction with the LRC) and environmental factors (hours employed, age) were also moderate predictors of retention. One social integration factor (socialized with other students on campus) was a weak predictor of retention.

Gender, race, enrollment in remedial courses, certainty about the major, high school GPA, Moraine Valley GPA, most other academic variables, most social integration variables, most activity variables, and most organizational variables were not found (in this analysis) to be related to retention. For a complete list of the variables not found to be related to retention see Appendix A.

This analysis was unable to distinguish any components of satisfaction, or identify specific areas of dissatisfaction associated with attrition that might lead to action. For example, the college could

"talk with a teacher in his or her office or outside of class" if these were known to be factors strongly affecting retention. However, the fact that these and many other social and academic variables did not predict retention does not necessarily mean that they play no part in it. It is possible that students who were dissatisfied with certain areas or aspects of Moraine Valley did not return their survey. It is probable that a higher response rate (especially from students who did *not* return the next year) would have improved the analysis.

This research and the literature also indicate that we need to be concerned about first-term retention. Future research on this topic will include a survey of first-time students early in fall 1996 (although it will necessarily be shorter and simpler than this survey.) A classroom retention survey (which reduces part of the non-response problem) is also a possibility.

Retaining students at a community college is challenging due to the diversity of situations and attributes and students' multiple and diverse reasons for not returning. Leaving is not always the result of unsatisfactory institutional performance. And "dropping out" is not always negative, or necessarily a bad thing for the student or the institution. Particularly for community colleges, student success does not always correspond to attending two full academic years or the completion of a degree.

Appendix A
Characteristics Not Significantly Related to Retention

Demographic variables

gender
race
type of curriculum (transfer or occupational)
enrolled in program (vs course enrollees)
transfer plans
purpose for coming to Moraine Valley
enrolled in one or more remedial courses (vs enrolled in college-level courses only)
highest level of formal education completed by either parent

Academic variables

self-reported high school GPA
Moraine Valley GPA
certainty about the major
talked with teacher in office or outside of class
used computer lab/Writing Center
wrote term or research paper
talked with an advisor/counselor about courses to take, requirements or education plans
[c] academic integration score (based on 7 academic integration items)
[c] academic satisfaction score (based on 10 academic satisfaction items)
[c] total satisfaction score (sum of 26 Moraine Valley satisfaction items)
[c] average satisfaction score (average of 26 Moraine Valley satisfaction items)

Academic difficulties:

skipped class
not completing homework
finding the self-discipline to study
trouble taking notes in class
math difficulties
financial problems
work responsibilities interfere with school work
difficulty making a decision about my major
dissatisfied with an instructor
test-taking problems
personal responsibilities interfere with school work
trouble paying attention to the teacher
writing difficulties
can't understand course materials
reading difficulties

can't find a place to study
transportation difficulties
[c] sum of difficulties experienced (based on 17 difficulty items)

Social integration variables
studied with other students
participated in class discussions
attended an art exhibit, concert or play on campus
informal contact with faculty
opportunities to make friends/meet new people
availability of student clubs and organizations
[c] social integration score (based on 3 activity items)
[c] sum of Moraine Valley activities (based on 10 activity items)
[c] sum of social integration (based on 6 social satisfaction items)

Organizational variables
new student orientation
career counseling services
variety of courses offered
challenging/stimulating courses
classes scheduled at convenient times
availability of needed classes
convenient registration process
availability of channels for expressing student complaints
recreational facilities
attractiveness of campus/buildings
financial aid assistance
availability of computer labs
overall quality of academic facilities
[c] organizational satisfaction score (based on 10 satisfaction items)
[c] student support score (based on 7 support satisfaction items)
[c] advising/counseling score (based on 5 advising/counseling items)

[c] indicates combined variable.